

EVALUATION OF A STANDARDS-BASED SUPPLEMENTAL PROGRAM IN READING

DR. DUANE INMAN

DR. LESLIE MARLOW

*Charter School of Education/Human Sciences
Berry College, Box 5019
Mount Berry, GA 300149*

DR. BENNIE BARRON

*Teacher Education Center
Northwestern State University
Natchitoches, LA 71497*

This pilot descriptive study examined expressed perceptions of a diverse group of teachers who, in the 2002-2003 school year, piloted implementation of a new standards based supplemental program in reading/language arts, EduSTRANDS. Over 600 teachers in 153 schools using a supplemental, standards based reading/language arts program were surveyed on their impressions of the features and effectiveness of the program. Standard assessment scores from the schools were compared for the year immediately preceding the use of the materials and for the first year of use of the materials. Overall teacher evaluations of the program were positive. Scores increased at all tested levels except in sixth grade.

Political, sociological and educational changes hallmarked the school atmosphere in the United States at the opening of the 21st century. The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed on January 8, 2002, provided the impetus for educators to take a closer look at classroom practices and subsequent student outcomes. The ultimate goal is to instruct in a manner which results in the highest possible student performance on standardized achievement measures thus addressing the demand for stronger accountability for results (www.ed.gov/nclb). Within the next decade "...2013-2014, all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts...". Where student performance is found to be

at less-than-desirable levels, measures must be taken to implement sound, research-based methodology. Students must be provided with advantageous education programs which address mandated standards and which have been found to be correlated with increased student performance on measures of their standards-based outcomes (NCLBA, 2002). The high standards on which student performance is to be based will come from the professional educational organizations. Specifically, national guidelines established by the International Reading Association (IRA) and by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) for reading and language arts will play a primary role in student evaluation.

In response to the demand for students

to achieve at high levels and to meet specified standards, all states have mandated a state-wide testing program for all of their students. For example, yearly in Louisiana students at specific grade levels are tested using the Louisiana Statewide Norm-Referenced Testing Program in order to ascertain their levels of achievement in comparison with national results (Louisiana State Education Progress Report, 2001-2002). The results of this test provide a standard measure for student achievement and can provide an indication of school progress on a year-to-year basis.

This pilot descriptive study examined expressed perceptions of a diverse group of teachers who, in the 2002-2003 school year, piloted implementation of a new standards based supplemental program in reading/language arts, EduSTRANDS. The EduSTRANDS materials address each of the standards set forth by IRA/NCTE and include multiple activities and strategies to introduce, reinforce, and evaluate student performance. Content examples and practice are provided for each identified skill. Lessons are arranged vertically between grades as well as horizontally within grades for grades 1-8. Well designed instructional approaches support effective reading instruction. According to the American Federation of Teachers (2003) the following components are needed to effectively teach reading: Comprehension strategies, vocabulary instruction, systematic and explicit instruction regarding written English, decoding skills, and phonemic/phonics instruction. The EduSTRANDS materials which address these components were developed in response to

numerous teacher requests for a coherent way to ensure all reading/language arts standards could be adequately and thoroughly addressed. Extant basal texts and available curricula often were limited in their consideration of the entire set of standards at particular grade levels.

Over 20 years ago reading research specialists investigated and identified primary instructional areas which were critical to students' success in reading (Share, Jorm, Maclean, & Matthews, 1984; Miller & Ellsworth, 1985). This research continued into the mid 1990s when studies began to emphasize the need for teachers to adapt and supplement lessons in order to meet the unique needs of individual students (Turner, 1995; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Pressley, 1998; Pressley, Rankin & Yokoi, 1996). More recently, the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), a re-examination of the findings of the National Reading Panel (Camilli, Vargas, & Yurecko, 2003) and research by Farstrup and Samuels (2002) re-emphasized the importance of a comprehensive reading program that allows for specific skill instruction in a variety of areas.

There are a number of programs which have been developed which claim to meet the criteria set forth by these research programs. However limited independent research is available on the effectiveness of these programs.

Support for the approach taken in this evaluative project was supplied by the IRA 2002 Position Statement on Standards Based Reading Instruction which identifies specific questions to be addressed when reviewing instructional materials:

- Does this program or instructional approach provide systematic and explicit instruction in the particular strategies that have been proven to relate to high rates of achievement in reading for the children I teach?
- Does the program or instructional approach provide flexibility for use within the range of learners in the various classrooms where it will be used? Are there assessment tools that assist teachers in identifying individual learning needs? Are there a variety of strategies and activities that are consistent with diverse learning needs?
- Does the program or instructional approach provide a collection of high-quality literary materials that are diverse in levels of difficulty, genre, topic, and cultural representation to meet the individual needs and interests of the children with whom it will be used?

As an outgrowth from the IRA (2002) Position Statement, the following research questions were addressed by this study:

1. What is the nature of the population of teachers currently using the EduSTRANDS materials?
2. What are the expressed teacher opinions of the materials?
3. What is the nature and direction of change in student scores on the Louisiana Statewide Norm-Referenced Testing Program instrument in the schools using the EduSTRANDS program?

POPULATION

Nineteen school systems within Louisiana participated in this pilot study. Six hundred twelve teachers from 153 schools cooperated in the implementation and assessment of the EduSTRANDS program. The schools ranged from fewer than 200 to over 500 total enrollment, grades K thru 12, and were located in diverse settings including rural, suburban, and urban with a wide diversity of ethnicities and economic levels represented by the 77,000 students using the program. Although some of the schools served grades K-12, only teachers actively engaged in teaching grades k-8 or using the EduSTRANDS materials for remediation in higher grades were surveyed.

INSTRUMENT

The EduSTRANDS Teacher Opinion Survey is composed of two major sections: Section One, containing seven items related to demographic information of the teachers and their classrooms and Section Two containing 14 items. The 14 items assessed expressed teacher perceptions regarding EduSTRANDS materials organization, practical aspects for using the materials, alignment with standards, and preparation for standard evaluation instruments. The instrument was developed by a panel of University professors specializing in reading, research, and education. The materials were peer reviewed and piloted for clarity by classroom teachers and revised multiple times prior to being disseminated to the target population.

Information concerning student performance within the schools was obtained from the Louisiana school report cards,

available as public domain information.

LIMITATIONS

Survey research, when conducted through the mail, typically results in respondent participation of less than 20% (Losh, 2003; Zhu 2001). Generally these respondents have strong feelings regarding the topic, either positive or negative, which influences their decision to participate. (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003).

This descriptive study does not attempt to demonstrate a causal effect for the program as indicated by student performance, although information regarding student performance for the year immediately prior to using EduSTRANDS and for the first

year of the use of EduSTRANDS is included for comparison purposes. To reach definite conclusions within the first year of implementation would be premature as both students and teachers needed some time to become familiar with the materials, not only with how to use them but how to most effectively integrate them into each instructional/curricular program.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PROCEDURES

All data was tabulated and analyzed using SPSS-x program running the Windows X P environment.

In early spring of 2003, survey packets were sent to each of the participants. Each packet contained a letter of explanation, a

Table 1
Demographic Information

Teaching Assignment	K-4	5-8	8-12	Other	
	54%	22%	9%	12%	
Years Experience	1-3	4-10	11-20	>20	
	9%	32%	25%	31%	
Education Level	Bachelors	Masters	Masters +	Some College	
	57%	15%	21%	3%	
School Enrollment	< 200	200-300	300-400	400-500	>500
	25%	8%	23%	19%	24%
Class Size	<15	15-20	21-25	26-30	30+
	12%	48%	30%	9%	0%

survey form and a self addressed stamped envelope for return. The return was anonymous with no identifiers for teacher, school, or school system included on either the envelope or the response form. There was no follow-up on the initial mailing. Approximately 30% of the completed surveys were returned, a rate which is well in excess of the 20% expected response rate for one-wave mail surveys (Losh, 2003; Zhu, 2001).

special classes not specified on the questionnaire. This was an experienced group of teachers with only 9% having fewer than four years of teaching experience. They taught in a wide variety of school sizes and 79% had a class size of 15-25 students. Fifty seven percent of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, with an additional 37% had at least a master's degree. The remaining three percent indicated "some" college.

RESULTS

Demographics

Respondent demographics are summarized in Table 1. The majority of the teachers (76%) taught in grades 1-8 with only 9% at higher grades. Twelve percent expressed that their assignment was "other" which probably indicates that their teaching assignments were multiple levels or

PROGRAM OPINIONS

In looking at the individual components of the satisfaction section of the survey, there is strong support from the teachers regarding the usefulness of the materials in the three categories-practical aspects of use (Table 2), alignment with standards (Table 3) and materials organization (Table 4). Noteworthy are the items in which there

Table 2
Practical Aspects of Use

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither
Ready for immediate use	80.8%	5.5%	9.3%
Ease of use of all materials	88.5%	2.8%	8.2%
Ease of lesson modifications	76.4%	2.8%	19.9%
Accommodates for student needs	82.3%	1.7%	10.4%
Use as enrichment	85.2%	2.8%	11.0%
Use for extended practice	89.6%	.6%	8.8%

Table 3
Alignment with Standards

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither
Aligned with content standards	88.5%	1.1%	9.9%
Aligned with state benchmarks	85.2%	1.1%	13.2
IOWA test	66.5%	3.9%	29.1%
LEAP test	67.6%	3.3%	28.6%

Table 4
Materials Organization

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither
Well organized materials	85.7%	2.2%	8.8%
Complements basal	74.7%	2.2%	20.3%
Complements reading/language arts curriculum	82.4%	2.8%	14.3%
Variety of lesson formats	81.3%	4.8%	13.7%

was over 85% agreement or strong agreement. These items were: Well-organized

materials, ease of use, alignment with content standards, alignment with state

benchmarks, usefulness for enrichment, and usefulness for extended practice. In looking for items of agreement between the 80% and 85% levels, teachers expressed agreement that the materials were ready for immediate use, complemented the reading and language arts programs, provided a variety of formats, and accommodated student needs. There were two remaining items with which at least 75% of the respondents agreed: the materials complement the basal in use and the materials provide ease of lesson modification.

Thus, there was agreement by more than 3/4 of the teachers with the usefulness of all the features of the program. When looking at the portion of the population which disagreed with the 14 items, there were no items with which there was disagreement at greater than 5.5%.

OUTCOMES

An examination of the progress of test scores within the schools using EduSTRANDS reveals that there were higher scores at all levels (Table 5) on the Louisiana Statewide Norm-Referenced Testing Program between spring 2002 and spring 2003 results except at grade six. All differences were significant at the $p > .05$ level. While this does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship between the use of the program and test scores, it does indicate that significant progress is being made in almost every grade where the program is in effect.

DISCUSSION

It is necessary to provide appropriate reading instruction to all students begin-

Table 5
Comparison of Mean Scores, 2002-2003

Grade Level	Mean Scores	
	2002	2003
3	48.31	52.22
5	46.13	51.75
6	48.50	41.98
7	46.17	47.14

ning in the early grades of elementary school and extending throughout middle and high school. To become good readers, students must develop an awareness of the skills needed for decoding as well as the ability to read text accurately and fluently and the ability to apply comprehension strategies as they read. Research included in the report from The National Reading Panel (2002) emphasized that teachers needed to adjust the instruction in these areas in order to meet the specific needs of their students. The program examined through this survey has materials that incorporate this component so that students receive instruction and support that integrates with the current classroom materials to supplement learning endeavors in reading. The results of the teacher satisfaction survey indicate that teachers are highly in agreement that the features of the program meet the requirements for an effective, research-based set of materials. According to the respondents, the versatility of the EduSTRANDS program provides teachers with the tools that are critical to the teaching of reading.

Additionally, an examination of the test scores indicates gains at almost all levels. Based on test score results and teacher evaluations, there appears to be no discernable distinction between the effectiveness of this program in grades k-8 and its use in specific remedial instruction at the high school level. It is strongly recommended that additional research be done in respect to student progress for the populations using the program and comparisons be made with non-participant peers to discover if the change in scores is indeed causal.

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Volume 41 Fall/2004 Number 3**