

INSIGHTS: Reading as Thinking

The *No Child Left Behind* Act has shifted the focus of reform to programs that have a research base. INSIGHTS: Reading as Thinking is a program of research-based instructional processes and learning strategies that produces measurable gains. INSIGHTS supports the following elements as recommended by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) in the report entitled “Put Reading First”¹:

- Phonemic awareness**
- Phonics**
- Fluency**
- Vocabulary**
- Text comprehension**

Given the learning opportunities provided in INSIGHTS, students have made remarkable gains in reading without the need for special treatments and costly interventions. INSIGHTS: Reading as Thinking is a developmental reading program designed specifically to teach both skills and the thinking processes necessary for skillful reading—that is, in-depth processing of text. Studies have demonstrated that INSIGHTS instruction makes a significant difference in reading achievement.

This report presents the research data from three large-scale implementations of INSIGHTS. The research results show significant reading achievement gains.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The National Institute for Literacy and other leading researchers define reading as both using phonics to decode words and constructing meaning from connected text which is text comprehension. Both phonetic decoding and comprehension require a broad repertoire of strategies. Good readers select, monitor, and evaluate their use of strategies in light of their purpose and the type of text.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Research also indicates that teachers need to model reading and thinking strategies for students, helping them understand when these strategies are most effective. This means teaching phonemic awareness to beginning readers, instructing students in how to use phonics for sounding out words, and going beyond simply asking comprehension questions to actually demonstrating the procedural steps involved in reading comprehension. The implication for both students and teachers is clear: reading is a strategic process of thinking to be taught at every grade.

INSIGHTS HELPS SCHOOLS MEET THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

INSIGHTS is a K-8 reading program that translates this research on reading—as well as research on instruction—into practical teaching materials. INSIGHTS’ strategy lessons are designed to meet the needs of both students and teachers by providing:

- Effective phonemic awareness and phonics lessons K-2**
- Cognitive strategies for constructing meaning**
- Instruction for selecting and monitoring these strategies**
- Interactive lessons that develop and motivate learning**
- Applications to literature and nonfiction**

PROFILE OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT IN MISSOURI

District Profile

The district consists of 50 elementary schools and 23 secondary schools with a combined population of 36,000 students. The population is extremely diverse, with minority populations totaling 70% of the student body.

Impetus for Reading Improvement

The school board developed an overall school improvement plan, The Strategic Plan, placing particular emphasis on the need for effective reading instruction.

Implementation

INSIGHTS was one of several reading programs field tested in classrooms throughout the district. During the first school year of implementation, the program was piloted in seven classrooms; by the end of the third year of implementation, the number of schools using the program had increased to 15, and by the seventh year, 37 schools had chosen INSIGHTS for their classrooms. It is particularly noteworthy that implementation in each school was voluntary and based on the approval of at least 75% of the faculty. On that basis, classroom use of INSIGHTS grew from just seven pilot classrooms to hundreds of classrooms serving over 16,000 students.

District Impact

From the outset, administrators closely monitored the success of INSIGHTS. In a carefully designed study to determine the effect of the program on reading achievement during the third year of implementation, twelve control schools were selected to match the pilot schools in terms of grade composition, student population, and geographic location. Both sets of schools had the same basal readers, and both groups devoted the same amount of time to reading instruction. The only difference was that the pilot schools incorporated INSIGHTS into their reading curriculum.

As Figure 1 indicates, the INSIGHTS pilot schools had higher reading mean scores than the control schools.

The program's impact was clearly positive: the INSIGHTS schools outperformed the control schools at each grade level. The differences between the reading scores of the INSIGHTS schools and the control schools were statistically significant.

Teacher perceptions of the program were also very positive. In a survey of teachers, it was found that 80 percent of the teachers liked the program and felt that their students did, too. More important, 72 percent of the teachers felt the program improved student reading achievement.

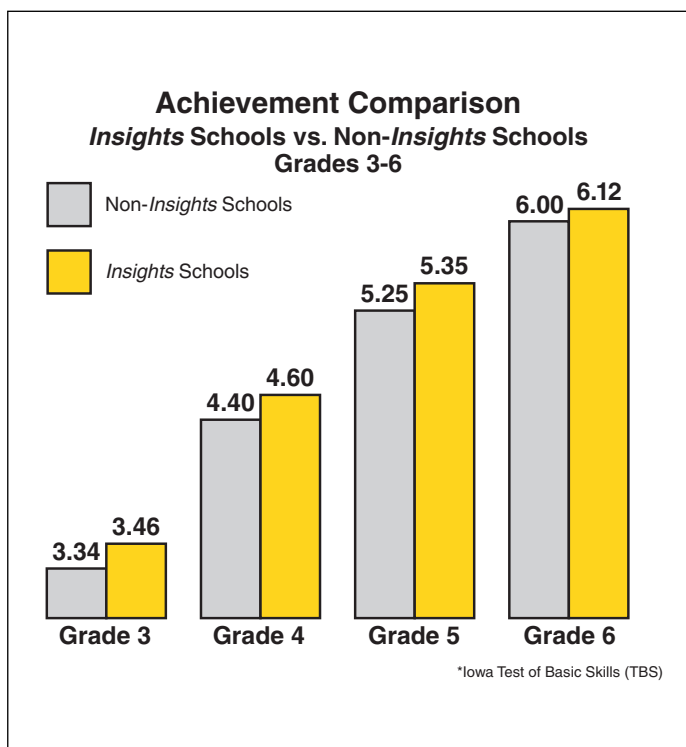


Figure 1

INSIGHTS is used extensively and is a proven program. It has been acclaimed for its emphasis on skills. Dr. Robert Sternberg, noted intelligence expert and editor of *Intelligence, Instruction, and Assessment: Theory into Practice*³, described the program as one which "equips students with the learning

PROFILE OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT IN ARIZONA

District Profile

The district, which serves over 21,000 students in 31 elementary (K-8) schools, is a unique urban district. Predominantly middle class, it has the per capita income and physical characteristics of a suburban community.

Impetus for Reading Improvement

Overall reading achievement has always been high in the district. In fact, reading scores on the California Achievement Tests average above the 80th percentile. But, as in all districts, the achievement of some students falls well below what it should be. The district made a commitment to better serve these at-risk students—students who so often “fall between the cracks.”

Implementation

To better serve these students, the district established a “Skill Mastery” staff. Members of this staff were trained specifically to improve the reading of the 1,100 students who were more than six months below reading grade level but were not served by Chapter I or other specific programs.

INSIGHTS was chosen for use in this program for several reasons. Its practical, concise instruction can be easily implemented—an important consideration since the Skill Mastery teachers had only 30 minutes of additional instruction time each day. Also, it was recognized that high-leverage strategies in the lessons would be motivational for these students for whom success with challenging concepts was an infrequent experience.

District Impact

The impact of INSIGHTS exceeded the district’s admittedly high expectations. Even in the first year of implementation, the achievement gains of students, as measured by their performance on the California Achievement Test, were significant.

A full 70% of the students showed grade equivalency gains of 1.0 year or more in the first year of the program. Some students showed as much as 4.0 years growth in the first year.

For the program to realize its goal of closing the gap between these students and average/above average students, however, the gains in achievement had to be sustained. The performance of students for two consecutive years showed that the first year gains were sustained.

Figure 2 summarizes the mean gains made by each group during the two year period. (For example, group A students were in fourth and then fifth grade.)

Clearly the improvement shown in achievement was not a one-year phenomenon. The first year gains were not only sustained but actually increased in three of the four student groups. The average yearly gains made by many students during this two year period nearly doubled their previous annual gains.

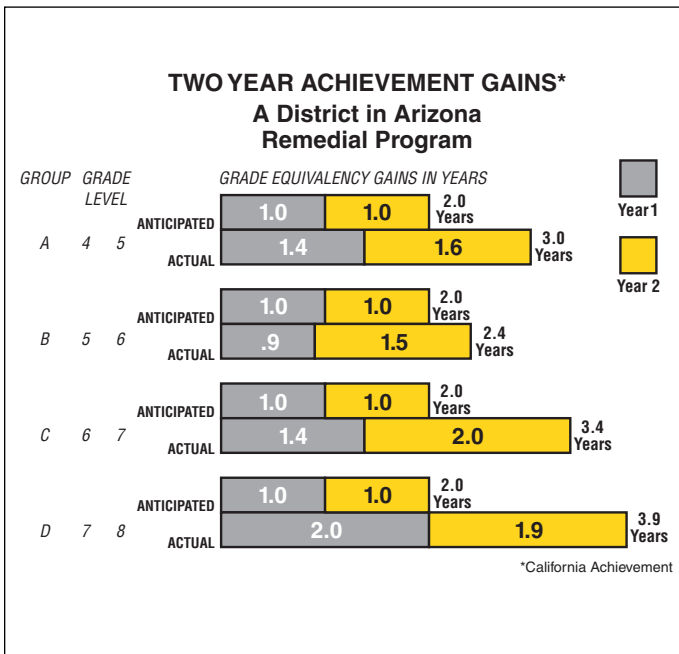


Figure 2

strategies and study skills they need to succeed in school and in their everyday lives.⁴ Sternberg noted that the result of INSIGHTS instruction is an emphasis on "learning to learn" which makes a significant impact on student reading achievement.

PROFILE OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT IN NEW YORK CITY

District Profile

This district is one of the largest in New York City's 32 community school districts. Nearly 25,000 students are served by 21 elementary and six intermediate schools. The schools are located in the predominantly African-American and Latino neighborhoods.

Impetus for Reading Improvement

The district's standardized testing revealed a steady decline in reading achievement. Seventy percent of the elementary and intermediate students were identified as below grade level in reading achievement. Moreover, nearly 18 percent of all elementary and intermediate students were achieving two or more years below grade level.

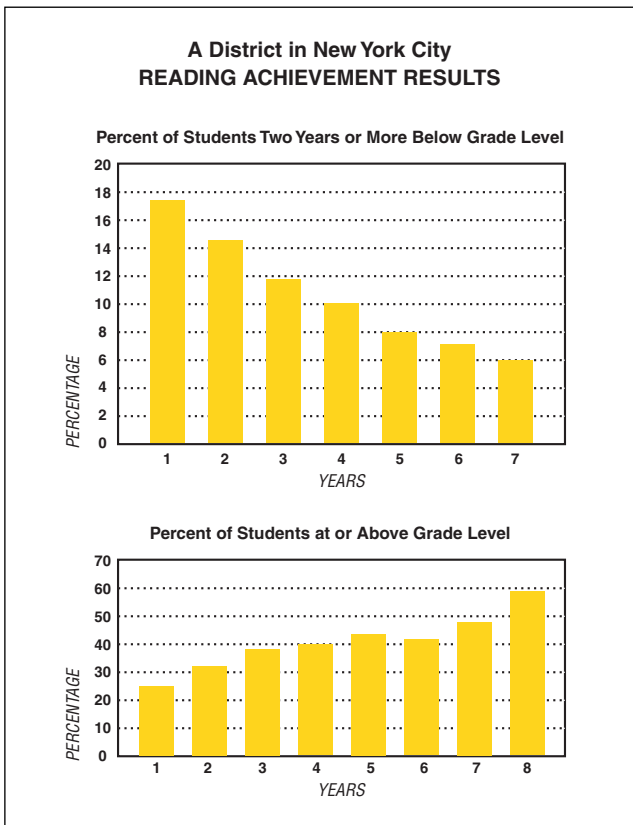


Figure 3

Implementation

With a large number of the district's students reading below grade level, it was clear that remedial reading programs had failed. As a solution, the district sought a more comprehensive and effective system of developmental reading instruction.

With the wide range of student needs in mind, the reading supervisor established a fully integrated program. INSIGHTS was chosen to provide comprehensive reading skills instruction. Guided reading, using the basal anthologies and library materials, were other components of the reading program.

INSIGHTS was implemented in all 27 elementary and intermediate schools. The full, district-wide implementation of the program provided valuable instructional consistency.

District Impact

The standardized test scores for the seven years of implementation reveal the dramatic progress made in reading achievement. The following gains have been achieved in the district since the INSIGHTS implementation (as measured by California Achievement Tests):

▲ During this period, the greatest gains were registered by students at greatest risk, those with achievement two or more years below grade level. This group, whose reading ability significantly impedes progress in all subjects, decreased in size significantly in both the elementary and intermediate schools. Overall, the number of students scoring two or more years below grade level decreased from nearly 18 percent in the first year of INSIGHTS implementation to just over 6 percent in the seventh year. Figure 3 shows the steady decline in this area during this time.

▲ In the first year, fewer than 30 percent of the elementary and intermediate grade students read at or above grade level. In spring of the eighth year, over 58 percent of student achievement was at or above grade level. Figure 3 graphs the increase in students achieving at or above grade level during the years INSIGHTS was implemented.

¹ Bonnie B. Armbruster, Ph.D., Fran Leher, and Jean Osborn, M. Ed., *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (Ann Arbor: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2001). ² Robert J. Sternberg, Ph.D., ed., and Wendy M. Williams, Ph.D., ed., *Intelligence, Instruction, and Assessment: Theory into Practice*, Educational Psychology Series (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998). ³ Robert J. Sternberg, "How Can We Teach Intelligence," *Educational Leadership*, September (1984): 38-48.