

# **A Comparison of *We Both Read* Books to Other At-Home Reading Materials in Improving Fluency, Attitudes about Reading, and Parent Participation through At-Home Reading with First Grade Students**

## **Summary of Research Findings**

An independent research study, conducted across four states with 561 first grade students and their parents during a ten-week period in the spring of 2008, explored the impact of specific text formats on at-home reading. The following research findings can be used by educators for grant-writing and to support the use of Title I and Reading First funds, and can be used in general by educators looking for research-based reading materials.

The primary questions addressed in the study were:

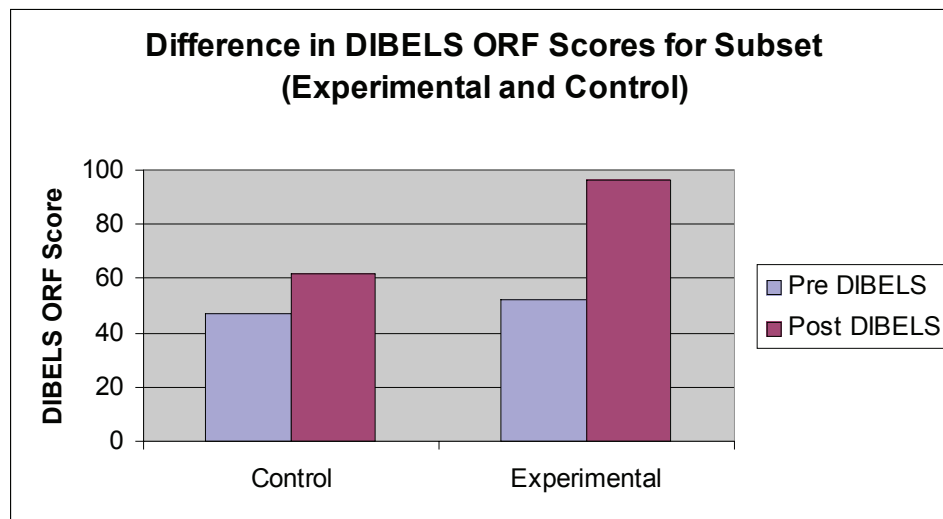
- Do specific text formats influence first grade students' growth in fluency and development of positive attitudes about reading? If so, how?
- What kind of effect, if any, does specific text format have on parent involvement and on the time parents spend reading together with a child of this age?
- Does the use of specific formats facilitate a change in practice, behavior, and attitude among families with young elementary school children?

*We Both Read* books (levels K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade) were chosen as the intervention materials for the experimental group. Their impact was compared and contrasted with reading materials that were currently being used by the participating schools and teachers for students to read at home with their parents. These current materials included leveled readers, trade books and isolated selections from curriculum or leveled text.

In order to test the hypotheses accurately, a subset of students whose families spent at least 30 minutes a week of parent/child reading time (both experimental and control) was chosen for examination. Although this created smaller comparison groups, it did assure that student data reflected situations in which families actually recorded minutes with regularity (the circumstance most likely to accurately reflect behavior and practice). The following findings are based on this subgroup:

- The control group's average score for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills Oral Reading Fluency (DIBELS ORF) was 47 at the start of the study and 62 at the end of the study – an increase of 15 points. The experimental group's average DIBELS ORF score was 52 at the start of the study and 96 at the end of the study – an increase of 44 points and **almost three times the increase of the control group.** (see Fig. 1 on next page)
- The “at-risk readers” within the experimental group (those with beginning DIBELS scores in the lowest third of the group) showed almost identical improvement, averaging 43.3 points in score improvement from their beginning scores.

**Figure 1: 30 Minutes Minimum Weekly Reading with Parent - Impact on Average DIBELS ORF Scores. (Control group using the at-home reading materials currently used by test schools; Experimental group using the We Both Read series)**



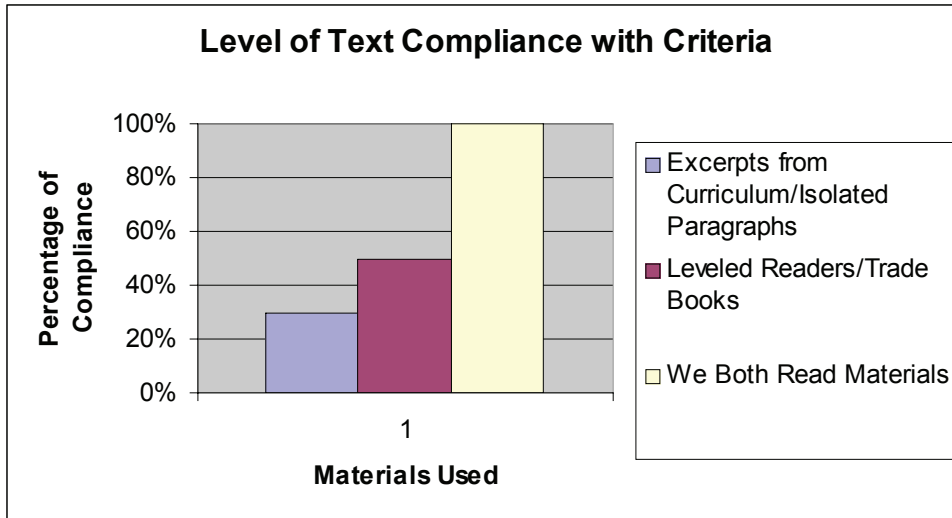
- Growth in fluency was further documented by use of Fuchs’ identification of anticipated growth in correct words per minute read (1993). The experimental group increased their “correct words read per minute” by 4 words per week (exceeding Fuchs’ levels); the control group increased by 1.5 words per week (falling below Fuchs’ identified levels of anticipated growth). Similar to the DIBELS scores, the experimental group’s average weekly increase in correct words read per minute was almost three times the increase of the control group.
- 71.4% of students within the experimental group, who recorded at least 30 minutes of parent/child reading per week together, raised their DIBELS scores more than 25 points. In contrast, only 38% of students within the control group had the same results.
- Additionally, the experimental subset reflected more growth in positive attitudes about reading than the corresponding control group as reflected in the results from parent surveys conducted.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of participating teachers surveyed pointed to the *We Both Read* intervention materials as important or very important in influencing positive attitudes about reading among their students exposed to them. In fact, 100% of teachers responding to the survey identified the paired reading format of the *We Both Read* books as a significant factor in increasing at-home reading with families. (None of the materials sent home with students in the control group had a paired reading format.)

- All of the teachers who responded to a post survey indicated they planned to continue use of the *We Both Read* materials the following year. When asked to consider how closely the intervention materials satisfied the purposes they have identified for their students' at-home reading, **88.6% of teachers indicated the *We Both Read* books were much preferred or equal to other materials in meeting their objectives for at-home reading.**
- When comparing the experimental and control students who recorded at least 30 minutes of parent/child reading per week, the experimental group showed much more time spent reading independently. Those in the control subset spent an average of 26.7 minutes per week in independent reading, while the experimental subset spent an average of 47.5 minutes per week in independent reading (**78% more than the control group**).
- The experimental group, using the *We Both Read* books, achieved significantly higher DIBELS scores and read more on their own versus the control group. The *We Both Read* books offered a different reading format than any of the materials used by the control group. The *We Both Read* books offered modeling of fluency and interaction in a paired reading format, including the exposure of students to higher level text structure and vocabulary during the adult's reading portion, as well as the support for new vocabulary building by allowing the student to read new words that have already been introduced into his/her listening vocabulary.

When examining the data available for all participants (including students who did not report reading at least 30 minutes per week with their parents), from the beginning to the end of the study the control group averaged an increase of 20 points and the experimental group averaged an increase of 26 points on the DIBELS ORF assessment. **The experimental group's average improvement was 6 points higher than the control, which represents a 30% greater improvement than the control.**

This study focused on the impact of the intervention materials on at-home reading and fluency skills. While other research indicates that improvement in fluency leads to improvement in comprehension, this study did not specifically address changes in reading comprehension. Subsequent studies may be useful to more specifically address reading comprehension.

Before this study began, a selection of each of the reading materials (both those to be used by the control group, as provided by the teachers, and the *We Both Read* books for the experimental group) were evaluated based on a specific list of criteria created to compare the impact of text format on at-home reading. The format of the *We Both Read* books was found to be superior to all other text formats. Elements of the format that met the criteria included: modeling of fluent reading (including introduction of higher-level vocabulary and more complex sentence structure during the times the child is listening to the adult read), repetition of key vocabulary on the child's page, and shared and repeated reading.



The interaction of key factors which impact reading motivation and behavior, and growth in reading skills, is complex. However, the findings of this investigation are certainly important for classroom teachers, school administrators, social service agencies, and other organizations that encourage parent involvement in education with a focus on reading. This study has revealed new factors for classroom teachers, school administrators, and parents to consider when working with first grade students and their families.

### Details of the organization of the study

Five hundred sixty-one (N=561) students from four states participated along with their families for a period of ten weeks. A subset of students reading consistently with families for at least 30 minutes per week was extracted for closer examination.

A randomized sampling created two distinct groups from those families who indicated a willingness to participate and record their reading time (both child/parent together and child's independent reading minutes). These groups were defined as:

- 1) the experimental group who received the *We Both Read* series of books as their "take-home-and-read-together" materials, and
- 2) the control group who took home other materials selected and assigned by the teacher (these were materials the teachers routinely sent home prior to their involvement in this study). No student in this group was exposed to the *We Both Read* series during the course of the study. This group routinely took home selections from their basal readers, leveled readers, or trade books.

Various instruments such as the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills-Oral Reading Fluency/DIBELS ORF (Good, Kaminski, et al, 1996), the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna and Kear, 1990), the Flying High with Fluency Rubric

(Miller, 2006) and a parent survey and reading log developed specifically for this study were used to collect data over the 10-week period.

A research team consisting of three individuals: Cathy Puett Miller, Independent Literacy Consultant, Dr. Lisa Dryden, Director of Graduate Programs at Texas Wesleyan University (Fort Worth), and Dr. Darlene Turner-White, Assistant Professor at Athens State University. All three were involved in the collection and analysis of this data. Additional voluntary contributors include Betty Thompson, a graduate student in the Statistics area of the Mathematics Department of the University of Alabama at Huntsville (who provided expertise in randomizing the sampling and conducting statistical tests on the data collected). Other volunteers include Jamia Sheppard, a social anthropologist and Dr. Louanne Jacobs of Alabama A&M University, as well as university graduate students from Texas Wesleyan University, who assisted in administration of assessments.