

EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S NONFICTION READING PROGRAMS

READING EXPEDITIONS AND WINDOWS ON LITERACY



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Purpose and Methodology

During the 2002-03 academic year, an independent team of researchers from the Eric Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication Skills, the Family Learning Association, and Indiana University conducted an experimental study of the impact of nonfiction educational materials produced by National Geographic School Publishing, a division of the National Geographic Society.

Specifically, the study examined three questions:

Do students whose teachers have used the National Geographic materials learn more and/or better understand the content or topic than students whose teachers do not use the materials?

Do students whose teachers have used the National Geographic materials develop more frequent application of desirable literacy skills than students whose teachers do not use the materials?

In what ways do teachers who have used them find the National Geographic materials useful or in need of improvement?

Group Selection

Drawing from schools throughout the United States and Canada, the research team identified 36 pairs of classes matched on student and school characteristics. The participating classes represented 15 states in the United States and two provinces in Canada, from a diverse range of socioeconomic settings and student characteristics. 1,781 students participated in the study.

Data Collection

One class in each pair was randomly assigned to choose five books from the *Reading Expeditions* and/or *Windows on Literacy* series and then to integrate these materials into their regular classroom instruction. Teachers were allowed to use the materials in any way they wished during a five to six week period during spring semester, 2003. However, classroom pairs were asked to attempt to coordinate their instruction and data collection efforts to ensure commonality across classes. The other class in the matched pair engaged in regular instruction without use of the materials. In both sets of classrooms, data were collected at the beginning and conclusion of the study on student learning and understanding of the content or topics of instruction and students' application of 18 literacy skills supported or encouraged through current federal education policy. Further, teachers who had integrated the National Geographic materials were asked to provide information about their use and value.

Results

Using a series of quantitative and qualitative analytic techniques, the study found the following:

- *Integration of the National Geographic books into regularly planned instruction promoted significantly greater student understanding of the topics or concepts than occurred when the materials were not integrated.* In each of four areas measured (detail, abstraction, number of ideas, and complexity), students whose teachers had used the materials gained from 20-40% more understanding than students whose teachers had not used the NGS materials.
- *Integration of the National Geographic materials into regularly planned instruction positively impacted students' application of desirable literacy skills during reading.* Students in classes that had made use of the NGS materials increased their use of the literacy skills by about 20% from the beginning to end of the study, while no significant changes were found in the use of these skills by comparison students.
- *Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the materials, their quality, and their usefulness.* Nearly unanimously, teachers who had used the materials reported them to be engaging for their students, adaptable to a range of uses and subjects, and a valuable enhancement to their instruction.

Conclusions

In summary, the findings of the present, experimental study are quite positive both in their relative consistency and their magnitude. Integration of materials from the National Geographic nonfiction literacy series into arrange of classes and subjects across the United States and Canada had positive impacts on student learning and use of desirable literacy skills during reading. Also important are the strong and positive perceptions teachers have of the quality and usefulness of the materials. Across these findings it appears that the *Windows on Literacy* and *Reading Expeditions* series published by National Geographic are interesting, engaging, and adaptable. And, most important, the materials are effective enhancements to teachers' classroom instruction and student learning.

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