



Improving Adolescent Literacy: The Thinking Reader Study

In fall 2008, the **Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands (REL-NEI)** launched a study of the effects of the interactive, computer-based **Thinking Reader** program on student reading achievement. The study explores how including Thinking Reader in the English/Language Arts curriculum of sixth-graders affects reading comprehension, vocabulary, use of reading comprehension strategies, and reading motivation.

What Is the Thinking Reader Program?

Thinking Reader, from Tom Snyder Productions, is a software program designed to advance literacy development, especially comprehension and vocabulary skills, among students in fifth through eighth grade. Students read popular, unabridged, multicultural, award-winning novels in an interactive online environment. (Nine “digital novels” are currently available.) The program uses animated coaches along with prompts, hints, model answers, and instant feedback embedded into the text to provide individualized instruction. Students practice and master seven scientifically based reading comprehension strategies.

Thinking Reader includes ongoing assessment tools. Individual work logs collect student responses to the strategy prompts, quick-check comprehension quizzes, and guided self-assessment. Teachers can review students’ online work and send feedback messages. The program includes a literature guide, reading strategies poster, and strategy bookmarks for students.

Who Is Participating?

The study involves 92 sixth-grade English/Language Arts teachers in 32 high-need schools in 16 districts in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. There are 130 classrooms and approximately 2,400 students in the study. The intervention is being delivered in sixth grade, at a time when reading for content-area

comprehension becomes increasingly important for academic success.

Who Is Conducting the Study?

The study is conducted by **REL-NEI**, which is administered by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), in partnership with American Institutes for Research (AIR), Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), and Sun Associates (Sun). It is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education.

What Is the Study Design?

The study is a randomized controlled trial, or RCT, with half of the participating teachers and their students assigned to the “intervention” group and the other half assigned to the “control” or comparison group. Participating schools agreed to have their teachers assigned to the intervention or control group through a lottery.

During the 2008–09 academic year, teachers in the intervention group replaced some of the texts in their standard reading curriculum with three digital novels in the **Thinking Reader** program. Control group teachers taught their schools’ typical reading curriculum, which may or may not include coverage of the same novels. At the beginning and end of the school year, researchers measured students’ reading achievement, use of reading comprehension strategies, and motivation for reading.

Participating schools received free **Thinking Reader** software, headphones and microphones, and paperback books for their sixth-grade reading classrooms. Intervention teachers received professional development and ongoing technical assistance during 2008–09. Control teachers will receive access to and training in the **Thinking Reader** program at no cost during 2009–10.

The final report is expected to be released in 2010.