

Impact on Student Achievement

Making Connections: Engaging Students in Language, Literacy, and Global Issues

Making Connections: Engaging Students in Language, Literacy, and Global Issues is a research-based textbook that helps students in grades 5-12 develop English language skills through highly engaging real-world investigations of current global issues. Designed for intermediate-level English language learners and striving readers, Making Connections combines language learning with opportunities for students to think critically about sustainable solutions for community development, environmental issues, quality of life, peace and conflict, and more. Aligned with education standards, this textbook includes nine chapters with lessons that have been reviewed and field tested by content experts, teachers, and students.

Making Connections is published by Facing the Future (www.facingthefuture.org), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to engage students in learning by making academics relevant to their lives. The organization develops and delivers curriculum resources, professional development, and service learning tools that empower students to think critically, develop a global perspective, and participate in positive solutions for a sustainable future.

Summary of Student Data

Students were tested before and after experiencing the Making Connections (“MC”) curriculum resource in their classrooms to determine whether or not the use of MC is an effective tool for improving reading comprehension, vocabulary, and content knowledge. These elements are required by state educational standards and by NCSS, NSES, TESOL, and NCTE/IRA standards. Results of the testing showed a statistically significant improvement in student achievement of 17% for the group of all 245 students. Students tested included those in grades 5-12, in 5 different subject areas and taught by 13 different teachers. Students scoring low during the pre-test showed greater improvement than students scoring at the higher end of the pre-test (21%). MC was equally effective with male and female students.

Study Methodology

A total of 245 students took pre-tests prior to exposure to learning one chapter from the Making Connections textbook. The tests consisted of 8-10 questions representing content knowledge, reading comprehension and vocabulary. The students tested represented 13 different classrooms/teachers from public schools, in both urban and rural areas in Texas, Massachusetts, Florida, Washington, Arkansas, Colorado, New York, and New Hampshire. MC was used in ELL, language arts, humanities, social studies, and special education subjects. Students were taught a chapter from the MC text and then were tested again. Pre- and post-test scores were compared, means and t test were determined for both the entire data set and separately for students with low pretest scores. Cohen Effect Size values were calculated to determine whether or not the results were meaningful.

Results Summary

The aggregate improvement of all students in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and content knowledge pre- and post- test was 17%. This result was highly significant ($p < .001$) and meaningful ($ES = .7$). This improvement changed to 21% when the ceiling effect was removed by not including scores from students who scored 70% or better on the pre-test.

	#Students Tested	Average Improvement ^a	Significance (t, p)	Effect Size ^b (d)
Total Improvement in Reading, Vocabulary and Comprehension	245	17% (1.5)	11.52, <.001	0.7, large
Total Improvement w/o Ceiling Effect: Includes students scoring less than 70% on pretest	167	21% (1.9)	11.35, <.001	1.0, large

^a scores were normally distributed

^b Cohen effect size (d), $(M_1 - M_2) / SD$. Used to determine if differences are meaningful. Cohen values of .2, .5 and .8 are considered small, medium and large, respectively.

Feedback from Teachers

“Facing the Future is an excellent resource for teaching secondary low level reading students and ELLs. The unit I worked with had a wide variety of comprehension strategies that emphasized phonemic awareness, fluency, background knowledge and vocabulary, and were all supported with high interest discussion and writing activities. The topics and activities are ENGAGING and RELEVANT TO TEENS-many intervention/remediation programs lack this.”
~ Jacquelyn Walz, Language Arts Teacher, Poudre High School, Colorado

“Making Connections is a wonderful literacy curriculum that has done a phenomenal job of integrating reading, social studies, science, language arts and even a little math, all while engaging students in global issues.” ~ Susan D. Smith, Special Education Teacher, Ed White High School, Florida

*Questions or comments about this study can be directed to Sheeba Jacob,
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