

EXPLORE

SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS

MEETING THE PROVISIONS OF THE
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT



A cornerstone of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) is that educators should engage in classroom practices that work. The law emphasizes the importance of selecting instructional approaches and materials that are based on scientific research and have a proven track record of success.



What is scientifically based research?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, an instructional practice or program is research-based when there is carefully obtained, reliable evidence that the program or practice works. The Department of Education uses an example of an evaluation that measures a group of children who are learning how to read using different methods, and then compares the results to see which method is most successful.

Why is scientifically based research sometimes difficult to obtain?

The challenge researchers face is that classrooms are not experimental laboratories where they can compare the effectiveness of one set of instructional practices or materials with another while holding all other variables constant. In addition, it is difficult to find reliable, valid, and cost-effective assessments that measure a full range of student ability, including creativity, higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving skills, the ability to work collaboratively, and the capacity to locate, evaluate, and use information.

What does the *No Child Left Behind Act* suggest?

NCLB suggests that educators look to the medical arena for a model. The Department of Education states, “Whenever the results of scientifically controlled studies (like clinical trials) are available, educators are expected to consider their results before making instructional decisions.” However, the law also recognizes that some practices (e.g., reading instruction) have been validated through years of peer-reviewed and replicated scientific research. These findings regarding reading instruction were written into the new law.

What scientific research supports the *Explore* programs?

The *Explore* programs are based on solid educational research and effective practices, including such pedagogical underpinnings as the following:

- **Active Learning.** Learning is most effective when students actively apply new knowledge in meaningful activities that link to their existing knowledge and skill development and when they are working within their zone of proximal development (Piaget, 1969; Gardner, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). The *Explore* programs focus on active learning by building on what the student knows and connecting it to new content the student will learn.
- **Learning Modalities.** Tapping into multiple learning modalities is essential because learners “store” information in various places within the brain. By activating multiple learning modalities (e.g., seeing, hearing, movement, and touch), learning is stored in various parts of the brain. This enables learners to recall the information more readily because they can “find” it stored in many places (*Educational Leadership: How the Brain Works*, 1998; Jensen, 1998). The *Explore* programs emphasize activities that activate multiple learning modalities—such as listening, reading, conducting hands-on experiments, researching information (in traditional sources as well as technology-based ones), presenting reenactments, and engaging in kinesthetic activities—as students learn the standards-based, academic content. (Note: *Explore America*, Third Edition, and *Explore World History*, Second Edition also include audio CDs of the textbook to help students “read” the text.)
- **Comprehensible Text Material.** Students must be able to understand the words they articulate in a textbook in order for the content material to be comprehensible. Research shows that good readers are purposeful and active, and that text comprehension can be improved by instruction. This research is summarized in *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (2001).

The *Explore* programs are grounded in the premise that students must have a purpose for reading, and they must be actively involved in the reading process. Activities throughout the programs focus on the following text comprehension strategies: **monitoring comprehension, using graphic and semantic organizers, asking and answering questions, recognizing text structures, and summarizing and synthesizing information.** The student text materials are sensitive to the needs of less confident readers, including English learners. For example, each page of the text focuses on a

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specific topic identified by the page heading. Most sentences are written in the active voice and use a rich, varied vocabulary. More difficult words are defined, in context, on the page

on which they appear for the first time. In addition, a photograph, illustration, chart, or map illustrates the concepts being discussed on the page.

- **Cooperative Learning Groups.** Learning is most effective when it occurs in cooperative group settings. Students learn best when they share information with other students, thereby creating opportunities for students to learn from one another. Teachers should structure cooperative learning activities that enable students to contribute to the collective knowledge of the group and gain understanding by listening to others. The collaborative environment works most effectively when students are engaged in activities that have many possible “right” answers (Hill & Hill, 1990). The *Explore* programs include strategies to engage learners collaboratively in a variety of student groupings (e.g., pairs, small groups).
- **Positive Learning Environment.** The learning environment must be positive and stress-free. Pressure and tension negatively affect learning, especially with English learners who have the additional burden of learning a complex skill, such as reading, in the context of a new language (Herrell, 2000; Joyce & Weil, 1972; Tiedt &

Tiedt, 1979; Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1974). The *Explore* programs emphasize the importance of creating a positive learning environment and suggest teaching strategies throughout the lessons to achieve this goal in the context of delivering standards-based, academic content.

- **Family Involvement.** Families play a key role in student achievement and school success. Research on this topic is summarized in *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (1994). The *Explore* programs acknowledge the critical role family plays in student achievement. Throughout the lessons, there are suggestions and activities to involve families in the learning process. (Note: *Explore America*, Third Edition, and *Explore World History*, Second Edition also include Home-School Connection newsletters for the teacher to send home with students. These newsletters contain information about what students are learning and also suggest resources and activities to extend learning at home.)



- **Technology.** Using technology such as computers to assist instruction can significantly improve students’ scores on standardized achievement tests in all major subject areas (Kulik, 1994; Sivin-Kachala & Bialo, 2000). Researchers also have found that technology is most powerful when used as a tool for problem-solving, conceptual development, and critical thinking (Culp, Hawkins & Honey, 1999; Sandholtz, Ringstaff & Dwyer, 1997; Means, 1994), as well as in gathering, organizing, and analyzing information, and using this information to solve problems (Reeves, 1998). The *Explore* programs integrate technology into the curriculum through web-based activities and also suggest the use of other technology throughout the lessons.

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