

Zaner-Bloser
Response to EdReports Evaluation
The Superkids Reading Program

April 2019

Summary

Zaner-Bloser appreciates the opportunity to respond to the EdReports review of *The Superkids Reading Program* for grades K–2. *The Superkids Reading Program* is a core literacy curriculum that integrates *all* aspects of reading seamlessly with language arts to positively impact student outcomes. Based on [scientific research and proven pedagogy](#), *Superkids* provides explicit and systematic phonics instruction and engaging decodable texts to teach children how to read accurately with fluency and comprehension. This approach has been proven effective in teaching children to read, aligning with virtually all standards for K–2 literacy instruction.

The EdReports evaluation tool is organized around two overarching gateways: 1) Text quality and complexity, and alignment to standards; 2) building knowledge with texts, vocabulary, and tasks. It is important to note that that these gateways are the same for all grades; *Superkids* partially meets the criteria based on these gateways due to its pedagogical approach designed to meet the unique needs of children in grades K–2.

***Superkids* Pedagogy**

- *The Superkids Reading Program* is designed specifically for grades K–2. It recognizes that the most important ability children need to develop in the primary grades is how to read. The entire program is organized around teaching the foundational skills for reading: phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This foundation gives children the skills they need to build knowledge through reading in grades 3 and beyond.
- *Superkids* provides uniquely engaging and meaningful fiction and nonfiction decodable texts that are aligned with the phonics, structural analysis, and word recognition skills that have been explicitly taught. The goal in using these texts is to give children repeated opportunities to apply their emerging skills to the task of reading. When children are still developing an understanding of the alphabetic principle, asking them to read text that has not been controlled for decodability can undermine their reliance on the decoding strategy, the most efficient strategy for unlocking the written word, instead leading them to resort to guessing at words and relying on context and pictures. These are not sustainable strategies.
- While providing ample opportunities for text reading, *Superkids* uses Super Smart informational text read-alouds in kindergarten and first grade to build content knowledge and vocabulary. Because of the strong foundation for automaticity and fluency in grades K–1, *Superkids* grade 2 continues to provide foundational skills instruction while transitioning to grade-level nonfiction *SUPER* magazines and high-quality, trade book literature that has not been controlled for decodability.

- The *Superkids* instructional approach, as opposed to a leveled-text approach, allows all children to be reading at grade level in every grade, differentiating *instruction* to scaffold children to the appropriate text complexity every step of the way.
- While the focus of K–2 instruction is building the neural networks for automaticity in reading, *Superkids* is a comprehensive, core literacy curriculum that also includes vocabulary, spelling, expressive writing, and cross-curricular connections. The instruction is intentional, multi-modal, and fully integrated.

The Science of Reading

Neuroscientists around the world have used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) extensively to map the areas of the brain associated with language and reading. Their research has identified three brain processing systems in the left hemisphere of the brain that are essential for the maximization of efficient skilled reading (Sandak, Mencl, Frost, & Pugh, 2004; Houdé, Rossi, Lubin, & Joliot, 2010).

Strong fluent readers have amassed a network of neural connections in and between the regions of the brain that process sounds, connect letters to sounds, and recognize written words. Though the human brain is simply not hard-wired for reading, we can and do learn how to read because neural circuitry can be built through successful instructional experiences (American Psychological Association, 2014; Hruby & Goswami, 2011; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2008).

Beginning readers need instruction that will help them develop the neural connections required for reading automaticity. Phonics instruction that emphasizes the mapping of letters to speech sounds (i.e., phonics) is the most efficient way to foster this process (Dehaene, 2010, p. 227). Neuroscience has now confirmed what educational research has revealed time and time again over the past three decades: systematic and explicit teaching of phonics is a cornerstone of effective beginning reading instruction. Using brain imaging techniques, researchers have found that instruction of new words through a phonics approach results in an increased speed of recall and increased brain activity in the left hemisphere (Taylor, Davis, & Rastle, 2017; Yoncheva, Wise, & McCandliss, 2015).

“[The] process whereby written words are converted into strings of phonemes must be taught explicitly. It does not develop spontaneously and must be acquired. [Reading instruction] must aim to lay down an efficient neuronal hierarchy, so that a child can recognize letters and graphemes and easily turn them into speech sounds. All other essential aspects of the literate mind—the mastery of spelling, the richness of vocabulary, the nuances of meaning, and the pleasures of literature—depend on this crucial step” (Dehaene, 2010, p.219).

To review Zaner-Bloser’s “Building the Reading Brain” white paper and the complete reference list, go to <https://www.superkidsreading.com/k-2-reading/pdf/readingBrain.pdf>.

Zaner-Bloser is proud of The Superkids Reading Program and confident in the positive impacts it is having across the United States with every major student group, as [evidenced](#) by the large body of efficacy the program has in improving reading achievement for children of all backgrounds in all types of schools.