

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Effectiveness of TCI's *History Alive!* for Eighth Graders: A Report of a Randomized Experiment in Alum Rock Union Elementary School District

Alum Rock Elementary Union School District had an interest in a middle school program being introduced by Teachers' Curriculum Institute (TCI) called *History Alive!* Supplementary materials from TCI were already in use in many of the classrooms and several of the district administrators were interested in whether the full middle school program recently introduced would be successful in their schools. *History Alive!* takes an activity-oriented approach quite distinct from a conventional textbook program. It was important to know whether this kind of program would be as effective as the current approach in achieving student success on the California Standards Test (CST) for history.

History Alive! *History Alive!* The United States program utilizes the TCI approach based on multiple intelligences, cooperative interaction and spiral curriculum. In addition to the student textbook that the regular history program utilizes, the *History Alive!* program is activity-oriented and incorporates use of additional materials for teachers and students. Professional development is also an important part of the program.

Setting. Alum Rock Elementary Union School District is a large (13,600 student) district with 20 elementary schools (K-5) and seven middle schools (1 K-8 and 6 6-8). The student population is approximately 76.3% Hispanic, 10.4% Asian, 3.5% White, and 3% African American. 80% of the student population was classified as economically disadvantaged and 59% of the student population was designated as English learners.

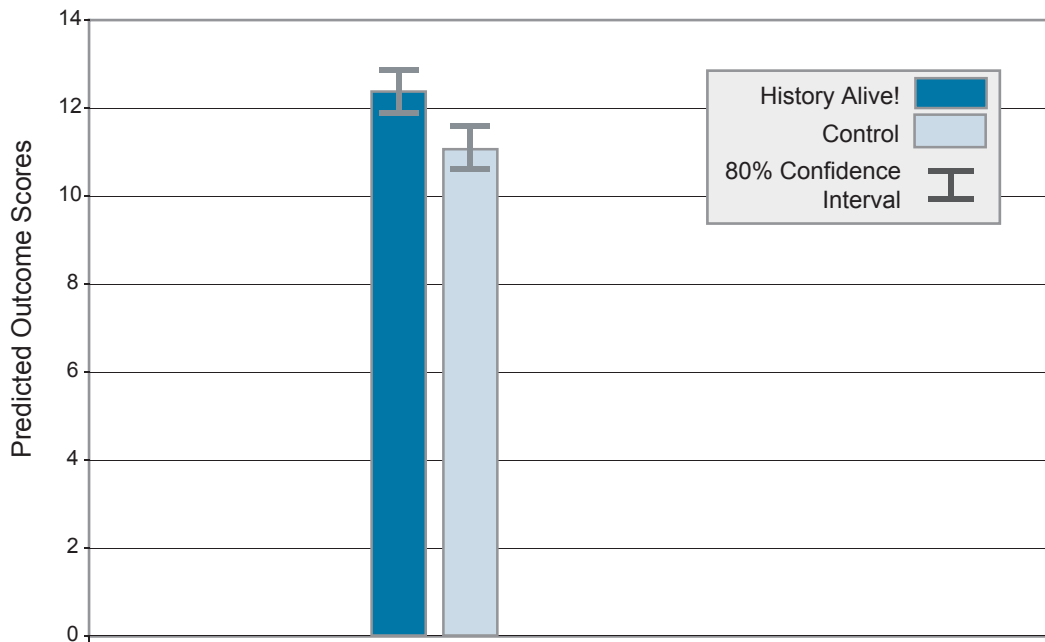
The district had previously adopted a textbook program as its regular history program for 8th graders prior to the availability of the TCI full-year *History Alive!* program. In seeking to adopt new history texts, the district recognized the need to test the effectiveness of a history program that employed more interactive techniques and materials.

Research design. The research is a comparison of outcomes for groups of students taught using the *History Alive!* program and similar students taught using the district's regular textbook-based history program. To help assure that student demographics were distributed between the both groups, pairs were formed within schools. Where more than two teachers came from the same school, teaching experience was used and as a consequence two teachers with substantial TCI experience were paired. Between each pair of teachers, we used a coin toss to randomly assign one of the teacher volunteers to the *History Alive!* group and the other to the control group. The primary outcome measure was the California Standards Test (CST) for History-Social Science (History) results from 2005.

Participants. After two teachers were removed for reasons unrelated to the treatment, there were four *History Alive!* teachers and five control teachers in the study. Some of the teachers had prior training and exposure to TCI's instructional approach and program materials. We measured this "contamination" through surveys.

Statistical analysis. We used a mixed model statistical analysis that involved two levels-- students and classes. We conducted three analyses. First we looked at the outcome measure, CST History, controlling for prior CST scores in English Language Arts (ELA). Second, we conducted the same analysis except controlling for English proficiency. Finally, we examined ELA as an outcome controlling for prior ELA score.

Results. The three analyses yielded a common pattern. In each case there was essentially no impact for the average student and in no case did we see a substantial negative impact for higher achieving students. But for the lower achieving students, there was a positive impact for History and ELA outcomes. We found a similar result but not as strong when looking at the difference between English learners and others. The following bar graph shows the statistical model's prediction for the student at the median of the bottom quartile of ELA achievement.



Median Student of the Bottom Quartile of the Pretest

Conclusion. Our randomized experiment in this district provides evidence of a positive impact for their lower scoring students working with TCI's *History Alive!* in comparison to what can be expected with the conventional textbook programs. Although there was no evidence of an advantage for the average student for which both programs gave similar results, we consistently found an interaction between the condition and the pretest score.

The limitations of this study must be considered in the interpretation. The prior use of the TCI materials by many of the control teachers would be expected to lower the contrast between the *History Alive!* and control groups and possibly make the apparent impact smaller than it might have been. Importantly, with only nine teachers altogether, there is a danger of bias introduced by chance. With respect to the possibility that the condition by ELA achievement interaction was due to an imbalanced distribution of teachers, we showed that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Our result for the English Language Arts outcome is intriguing and warrants further investigation. We see the result as providing support for the conclusion that *History Alive!* is differentially effective for the lower scoring students.

The important finding was that *History Alive!* differentially benefits the students with lower ELA scores and possibly those who are learning English. In districts with large numbers of such students, this program may have the effect of reducing the achievement gap. Considered as a local pilot in Alum Rock, the study adds to the information available on which to base their adoption decisions.

To read the complete report, contact:

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