

“Choosing *Horizons* or *Reading Mastery*”

By Siegfried Engelmann

The question, "Which program is better?" doesn't have a clear answer. *Reading Mastery* is the quintessence of efficiency. It requires fewer entry skills; it introduces the essential elements of the reading code in efficient ways. Because of its orthographic prompts, it is able to present a very wide range of words as 'decodable' words, and it is able to fashion generalizations around these words. *Reading Mastery's* low-skill entry criteria mean that it works well with children in K and even pre-K. It is particularly valuable in working with lower-performing beginning readers.

Horizons teaches a greater number of words and a broader range of skills, both comprehension skills and decoding strategies. *Horizons* places more emphasis on illustrations and other features that are reinforcing to children. *Horizons* also works better than *Reading Mastery* as a remedial program for older students who have very limited decoding skills. Students entering *Horizons* do not have to learn as many new orthographic conventions. Also, after they have gone through the program, it is easier for them to transition to unprompted print.

The price of the *Horizons'* advantages is the additional preskills that entering children need. Because children should at least have some familiarity with letter names (and ideally know them) the program is not appropriate for very low beginning readers in K or pre-K. Once lower-performing children have learned letter names, however, *Horizons* is quite effective. A final advantage of *Horizons* is that it is a very good beginning-reading program for children who are second-language learners. The comprehension activities, pictures, and manner in which the text is transformed on some of the second readings give these children more information about how the language works and what various words and phrases mean.

Reading Mastery and *Horizons* are different in specific details, not in their overall capacity to teach children who meet entry requirements for them. Their differences highlight the fact that sounds of letters may be introduced systematically according to at least two different schemes. Both, however, are careful. Also, blending, comprehension, and other reading activities may be designed in more than one way, but the skills must be developed through systematic, small-step progressions that make it possible for all children whose performance qualifies them to begin the program to learn everything in the program and learn it in a timely manner.

For complete article, see “About Reading—A Comparison of *Reading Mastery* and *Horizons*” by Siegfried Engelmann (*Effective School Practices*, Volume 18, Number 3: Winter, 2000, pages 15-26.)