

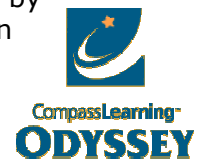
# Florida Center for Reading Research

Compass Learning Odyssey Reading K-2

## What is Compass Learning Odyssey Reading?

*Compass Learning Odyssey Reading K-2* is one of many programs offered under the Literacy for Success program published by WRC Media. Since 1992, several programs within Literacy for Success have evolved in response to the growing body of research on developing literacy. The Literacy for Success program includes the Playbox program, the GRADE Assessment test, the STEPS program, and Weekly Reader. It also includes four components that comprise *The Literacy Package*. These consist of the Integrated Language Arts (ILA) program, the English Language Development (ELD) program, the Spelling program, and *Compass Learning Odyssey Reading*. Each one of these programs has a different scope and sequence and theme. The ILA program is a literature-based curriculum where reading is taught in the context of other language arts activities using themes from different subject areas. The emphasis is on literature with a predictable structure and language pattern. Technology is integrated into this educational program along with large group, writing, listening and art activities. The ELD program emphasizes listening and speaking for students acquiring the English language. This program was developed in conjunction with the state of Florida for students learning the English language. The structure of the lessons is similar to the Integrated Language Arts Program. The Spelling Program for grades 1 and 2 utilizes a different theme to present words from the Dolch list by grouping them according to reading level, phonetic structure, or other common elements. The *Compass Learning Odyssey Reading K-2* reading program is the fourth part of The Literacy Package and the focus of this report.

*Compass Learning Odyssey Reading K-2* is a supplementary computer based reading program that develops reading skills through thematic based units. *Compass Learning Odyssey Reading* consists of grade level teacher guides, a software program for reading, and the Compass Learning Assessment System (C-PAS). The teacher guides offer a general description of the lesson activities and suggest several ways the materials can be used to supplement the regular reading curriculum used in a classroom. Students proceed through the *Compass Learning* sequentially, by working on specific skills, or by following the prescribed path of instruction based on the results of the assessment tests. Teachers depend on the school's file server to access the entire program. The recommended schedule is for each student to spend 3 twenty-minute sessions each week working through the software program; however, it can also be used during a regularly scheduled computer lab time. Each lesson focuses on a particular theme and includes activities that last 5 to 10 minutes each. Used sequentially, each lesson follows the same pattern beginning with: 1) a pre-reading activity to activate prior knowledge and introduce new concepts; 2) an uninterrupted presentation of a whole story (often one with a rhyming structure); 3) sounds, phonograms for word identification, word families and for Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, phonics and phonetic word analysis skills; and, 4) comprehension based on main idea, sequencing and predicting. In 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, the lesson ends with a brief writing activity that encourages creativity. There are a total of 12 units for Kindergarten, 23 for first grade and 21 for second grade.



If the reading program is being used for skill development or as an intervention plan, the teacher or aide guides the student using two separate assessment tools. There is the individual lesson diagnostic that assesses student mastery of the instructional objective and the C-PAS, a criterion referenced test on the computer that assesses key skills targeted by tests such as the FCAT. Reports are available detailing skill mastery, suggested instructional path, time spent on each task and item analysis. Students work on the computer independently, following the suggested sequence of skill activities. They automatically repeat the lesson objectives through additional instructional activities until mastery is met (this level is preset at 70% but can be changed). For some students, just repeating the lesson activity may not be adequate or useful instruction to ensure understanding of the concept.

### Is Compass Learning Odyssey Reading aligned with Reading First?

Reading First specifies five critical components for a comprehensive reading program: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. *Odyssey Reading* is a supplemental program that addresses these components to varying degrees.

Phonemic awareness is limited to the skill of listening for initial, medial and final sounds in words. Several consonant or vowels sounds are taught in one lesson. Blending and segmenting skills are not currently included in the program; however, these skills will be incorporated in future editions of the program.

In regard to teaching phonics, the sequence begins in kindergarten with low utility sounds before high utility sounds and stop sounds (e.g. b, c) before continuous sounds. Stop sounds are sometimes more difficult for students to learn and apply to decoding. Three new letter sounds are introduced in each lesson. This letter sound introduction occurs after the story in each lesson. In some cases, the letter sound examples do not apply the sound correctly. For example, "whistle" is used to teach the sound |w|. Systematic instruction and practice on segmenting and beginning word attack skills are not included. Cumulative review related to letter sounds is infrequent in the first grade program. Students learn new words through phonograms and other word patterns.

Fluency is addressed during the story reading part of the lesson by having the story read to the student. After several readings, the student is asked to read it independently. Since the stories are not decodable in terms of phonological structures or sight words the child has already mastered, and may or may not be at the student's instructional reading level, this strategy does not provide students the kind of practice reading connected text that most effectively builds reading fluency.

Vocabulary is implicitly developed in the context of listening and reading the stories. It is also taught by providing definitions of words in the pre-reading section of each lesson. Opportunities for students to apply and review new vocabulary are not provided. Writing activities begin with simple tasks such as sentence completion or short descriptions and progresses to longer, more creative writing prompts.

Comprehension strategies are not explicitly taught. The focus is on verifying comprehension by choosing the correct picture to answer questions about story details, main idea, sequencing and prediction. Difficulties for the student may arise from confusion over word choice and lack of vocabulary development prior to the story. For example, in a second grade story they say, "the Hippo got stuck in the *muck*" but the correct comprehension answer says, "the Hippo got stuck in the *mud*".

Comprehension is related more to the student's listening skills than reading skills. There are questions in the comprehension section where the student is asked to respond without prior instruction. For example, the student may be asked to choose a word to complete the sentence that gives the main idea for the story before he is instructed on the concept of main idea. If the student answers incorrectly, he is given more examples until he figures out the concept.

Professional development is provided separately through several delivery models. Schools can select these according to their individual needs. One option is a CD-ROM showing a virtual classroom, another is Internet training and the third option is on-site. Schools choose the number of days of training to be implemented throughout the first year. Initial training focuses on management of the classroom and the C-PAS assessment as well as training in use of the reading curriculum. Online help from the district educational consultant or review of the training on a CD-Rom is also available.

### Research Support for Compass Learning

*Compass Learning* was founded in 1972, 31 years ago. The Milken Foundation conducted a longitudinal study in West Virginia to examine the effectiveness of technology-based instruction. *Compass Learning* provided the software to 70% of the state public schools. However, it was not clearly specified in the report of the study that *Compass Learning* was actually implemented or responsible for any improvement in reading scores.

A study of *Compass Learning's* effectiveness was undertaken in the Wilson Elementary School District No. 7, in Phoenix, Arizona in a K-8 setting. A unique feature of this particular study is that students had access to a dedicated computer and a range of instructional courseware during the whole school day. Reading scores were not reported for the older students, but the beginning median percentile scores on the SAT 9 for the kindergarteners were 33. As 2<sup>nd</sup> graders on the SAT 9, their median percentile scores had increased to 68. These results demonstrate that the students in this school made impressive gains in the level of their reading skills when compared to the standardization sample for the test being used. In other words, when the students entered the study in kindergarten, 67% of a national sample of students performed better than they did. In contrast, by the second grade, only 32% of the national sample had higher reading scores on the test. However, the actual factors responsible for these reading gains cannot be determined from this study, since the study did not use a control group that received everything in the curriculum except exposure to the *Compass Learning* software. In other words, these results may have been obtained as a result of general strengths in the overall curriculum and teaching in the school, rather than being specifically attributable to the use of the *Compass Learning* system.

Well-designed, reliable research studies for *Compass Learning's* efficacy are lacking. Future studies should employ control groups and have sound experimental designs. Such studies will be very helpful in generating knowledge for educators about *Compass Learning's* effectiveness.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Compass Learning Odyssey Reading*:

- Teachers can assess and monitor student progress at all times.
- The assessment tools can prescribe an individualized learning program based on student strengths and weaknesses.
- The reading objectives are aligned with core state standards.
- The computer-based instruction can be integrated into the regular classroom or used in a computer lab setting.
- Students receive immediate feedback for correct and incorrect answers.

### Weaknesses of *Compass Learning Odyssey Reading*:

- Instruction is not always explicit, systematic or clearly linked in all five components.
- Students are given the option to hear the story read aloud. Listening to the story being read may promote word memorization rather than application of reading strategies.

## Which Florida counties have schools that implement Compass Learning?

Alachua County	352-955-7527
Brevard County	321-631-1911
Broward County	954-765-6271
Duval County	904-390-2115
Hendry County	863-674-4555
Lee County	863-674-4642
Leon County	850-487-7147
Miami-Dade County	305-995-1428
Orange County	407-317-3202
Osceola County	407-870-4008
Polk County	863-534-0500
Sarasota County	941-927-9000
Volusia County	386-734-7190

## For More Information

[http://www.compasslearning.com/home\\_flash.html](http://www.compasslearning.com/home_flash.html)

## References



Compass Learning, Inc. (2002). *Compass Learning Scientifically Based Research*.

Lead Reviewer: Mary Van Sciver, M.S.

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