

Reading the Media: Media Literacy in High School English

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My Goals

Tell the story of why and how high school English teachers reshaped the curriculum to prepare their students to critically analyze all aspects of contemporary media culture

Describe the development of the innovative curriculum that incorporates popular media, television, journalism, film, and new media into the required English curriculum

Provide empirical evidence of the impact of media literacy on the academic achievement of adolescents



Research Methods

QUALITATIVE: 21 hours of transcribed interviews with teachers and students; student writing samples, curriculum materials

QUANTITATIVE: quasi-experimental pre-post design with matched control group with measures of reading, listening, viewing and media analysis skills



Background

Expansion of the high school for arrival of Grade 9 students creates an opportunity to revise curriculum in Grades 9-12

- **Grade 9** focus on World Literature
- **Grade 10** focus on American Literature
- **Grade 11** focus on Media/Communications
- **Grade 12** focus on elective choices, including creative writing, public speaking, film, poetry, TV production, Shakespeare



Why They Did It

RESPONSIVENESS: “Mass media, popular culture and technology are significant forms of expression and communication in contemporary society.”

RELEVANCE: “We are aiming to help students become critical thinkers in responding to the world they live in.”

RESPECT: “It’s important to set higher goals to maximize learning for all students.”



Mind Over Media

Video created by the National Education Association (NEA) and aired on Court TV



Unique Features of CHS English Dept

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING: Diversity of students' lived experiences makes class discussions worthwhile learning experiences.

BLOCK SCHEDULING: Structure enables varied teaching strategies emphasizing multimodal reading/writing

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM:
Curriculum provides shared aims, goals, And themes while enabling teachers to deploy their unique talents, passions and interests



Themes

- Advertising, persuasion and propaganda
- Point of view in storytelling, literature, nonfiction and film
- Humans' complex relationship with technology
- The role of journalism in society
- The process of literary adaptation
- How entertainment media reflects and shapes cultural values
- The representation of gender, race and ethnicity in media messages
- The personal and social impact of media violence



A Focus on Critical Questions

TURN OFF AND DISCUSS

TRUE FALSE \$ GOOD BAD
Reality Check Private Gain or Public Good? Values Check

Read between the lines What's left out Record/Save for later

WARNING

Stereotype alert Solutions too easy

Off Books
TV Internet
Newspapers Movies
Radio Music
Magazines Video Games

Media Education Lab
Temple University
<http://mediasmartphilly.com>

Key Questions of Media Literacy

1. Who is the author and what is the purpose of the message?
What techniques are used to attract your attention?
Styles, values and perspectives are represented?
Different people are represented?
Message

mediasmartphilly.com

Multimodal Texts

BOOKS:

Orwell, 1984

Shelley, Frankenstein

Stark, Glued to the Set

Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Junger, The Perfect Storm

Hamill, News is a Verb

Anderson, Feed

Faulkner, As I Lay Dying

FILMS:

Tough Guise, All the President's Men

High Fidelity, Bamboozled



Multimodal Texts

MAGAZINES: Adbusters, Brill's Content
The New Yorker, Time, US News & World
Report

NEWSPAPERS: Concord Monitor,
Boston Globe, New York Times

TV: Burden of Proof, 60 Minutes
20/20



Instructional Methods

- Activation of prior knowledge
- Close reading & textual analysis
- Discussion connects text to text, text to self & text to world
- Informal pre-writing
- Small-group activities
- Research and information gathering
- Writing for specific purposes to varied audiences
- Variety of writing styles and genres
- Focus correcting (grammar, spelling)

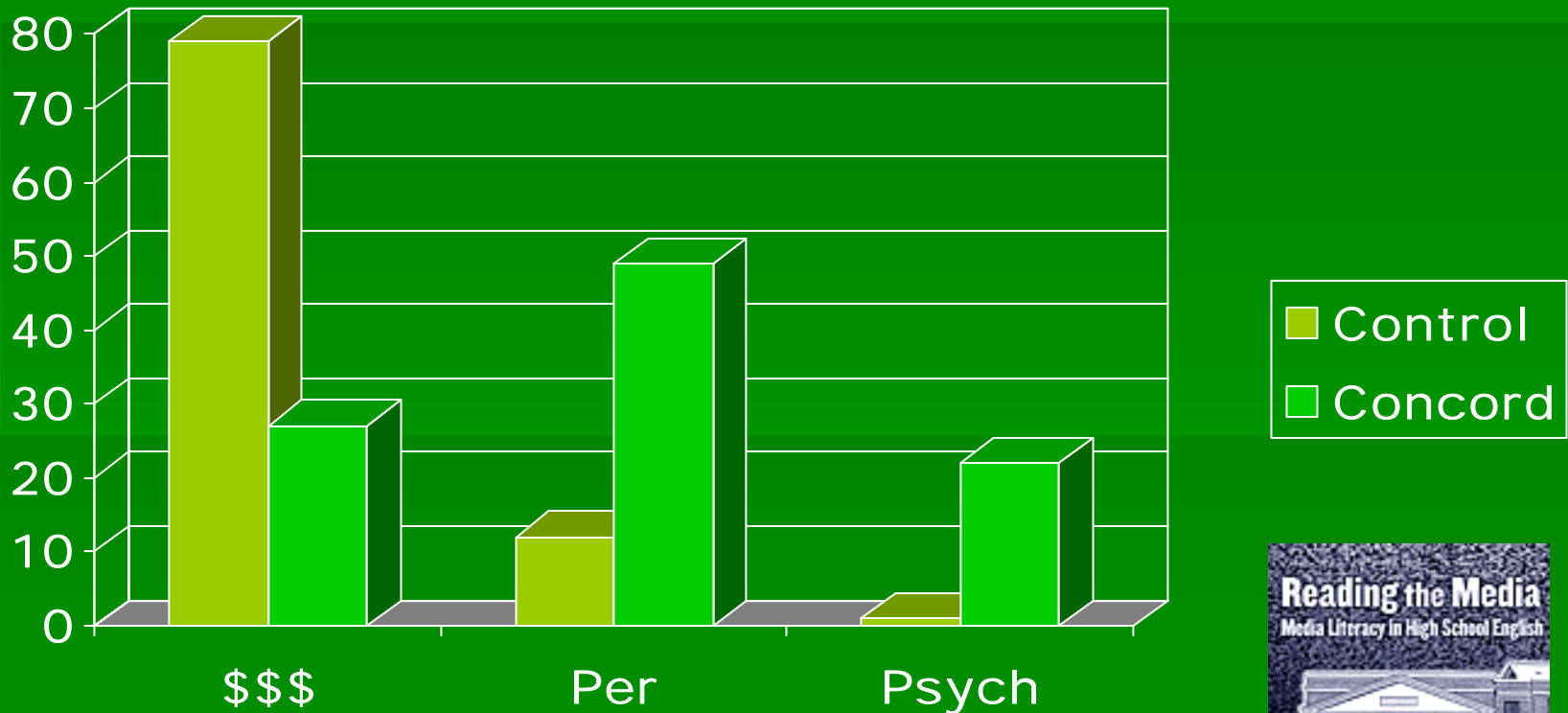


Measuring Program Impact

1. Advertising Analysis
2. Critical Viewing Skills
3. Civic Engagement
4. Reading Comprehension & Analysis



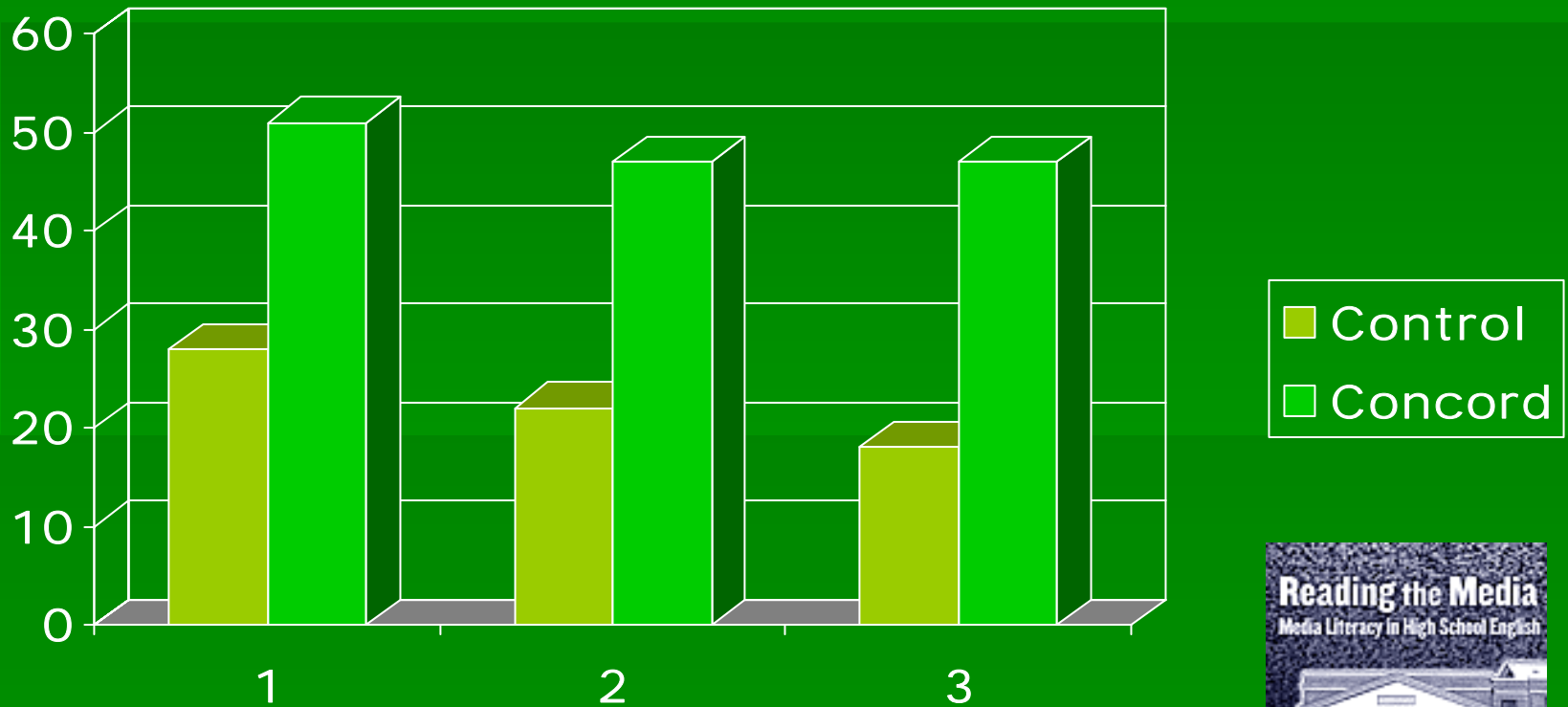
Increased Understanding of the Complex Purposes of Advertising



\$\$\$ = purpose is a business reason
per = purpose is a persuasive reason
psych = purpose strategically links product to emotion



Recognition of an Unstated Subtext Message in Advertising



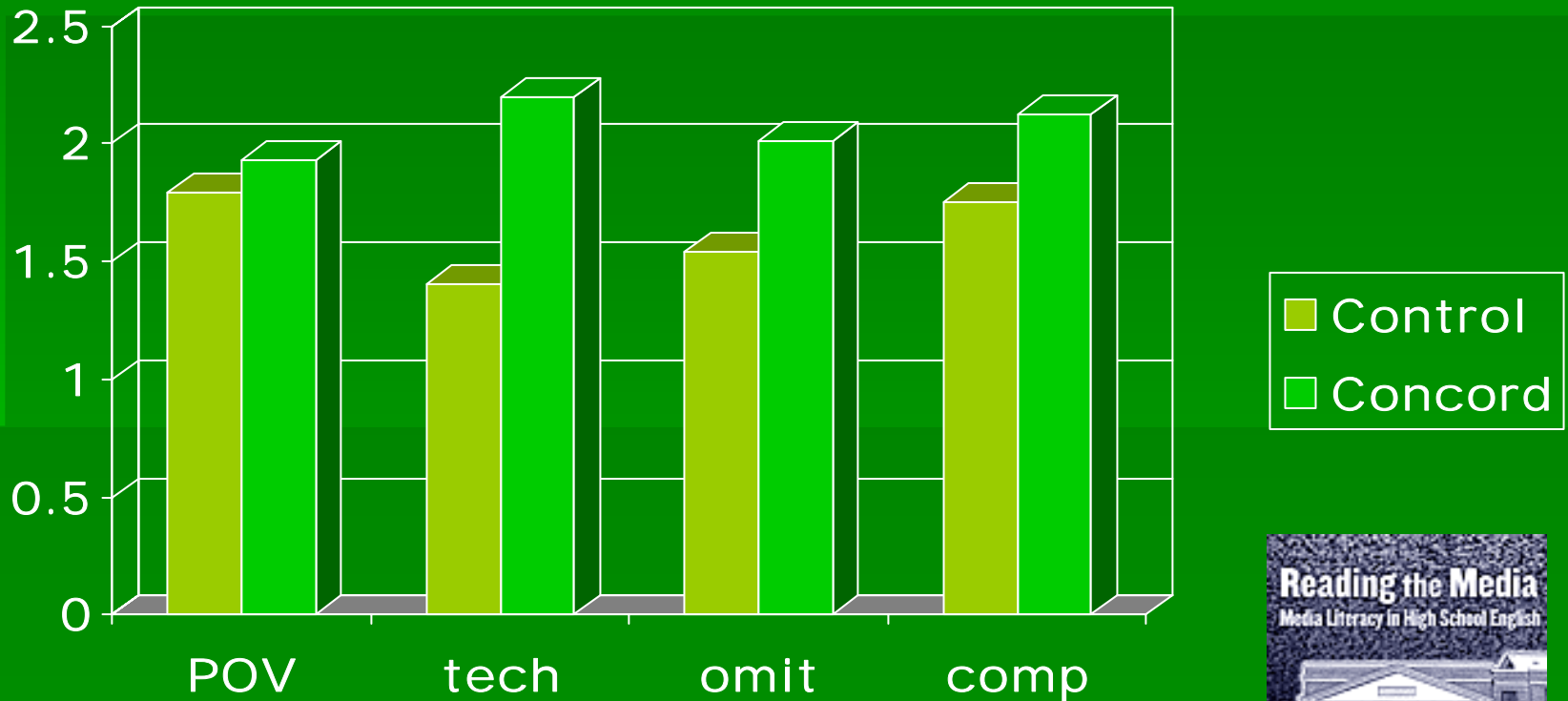
1 = “be cool”

2 = “change your lifestyle by consumption”

3 = “be responsible”



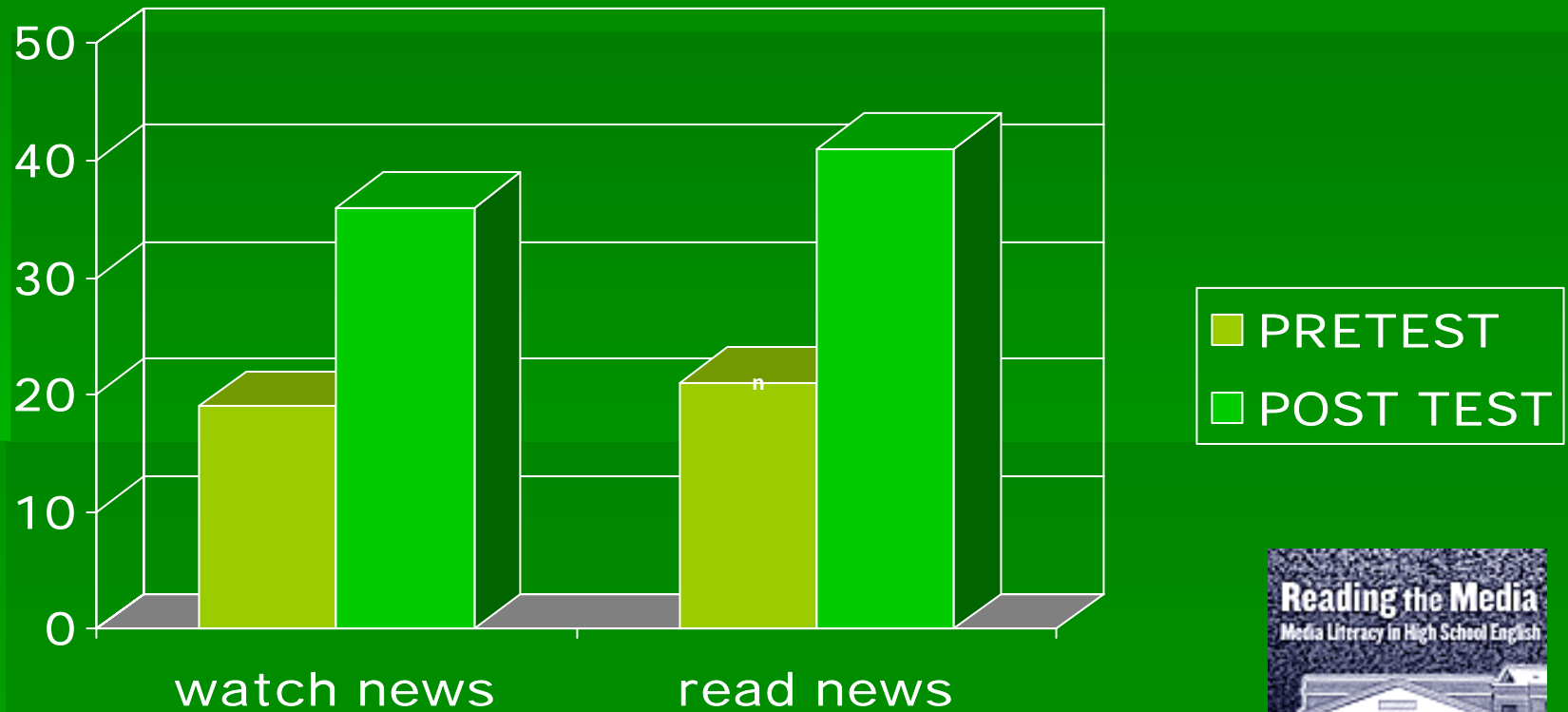
Critical Viewing of Television News



POV = number of multiple points of view identified
tech = creative construction techniques identified
omit = omitted information supplied
comp = points of comparison/contrast



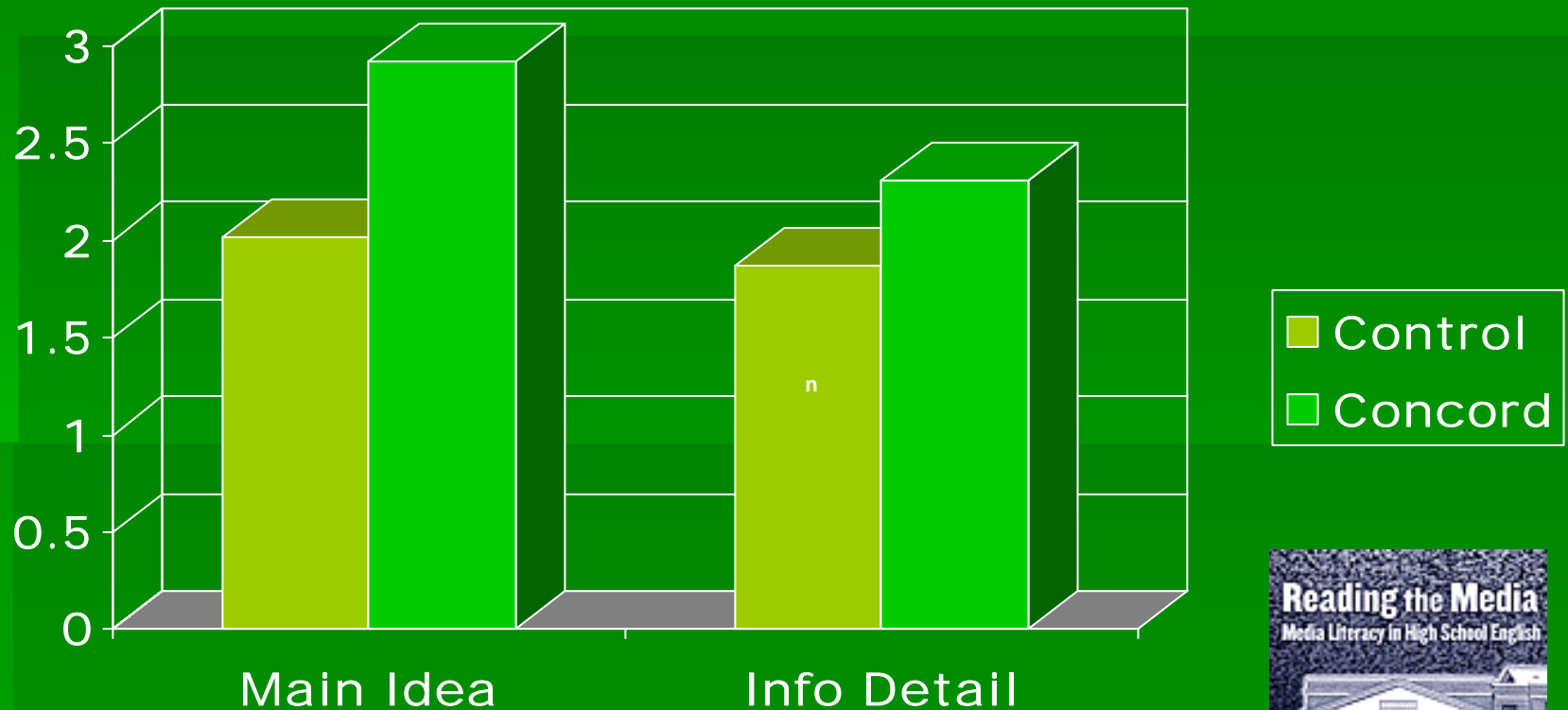
Increased Numbers of Students Choosing News & Current Events



Percent who watch or read news and current events every day



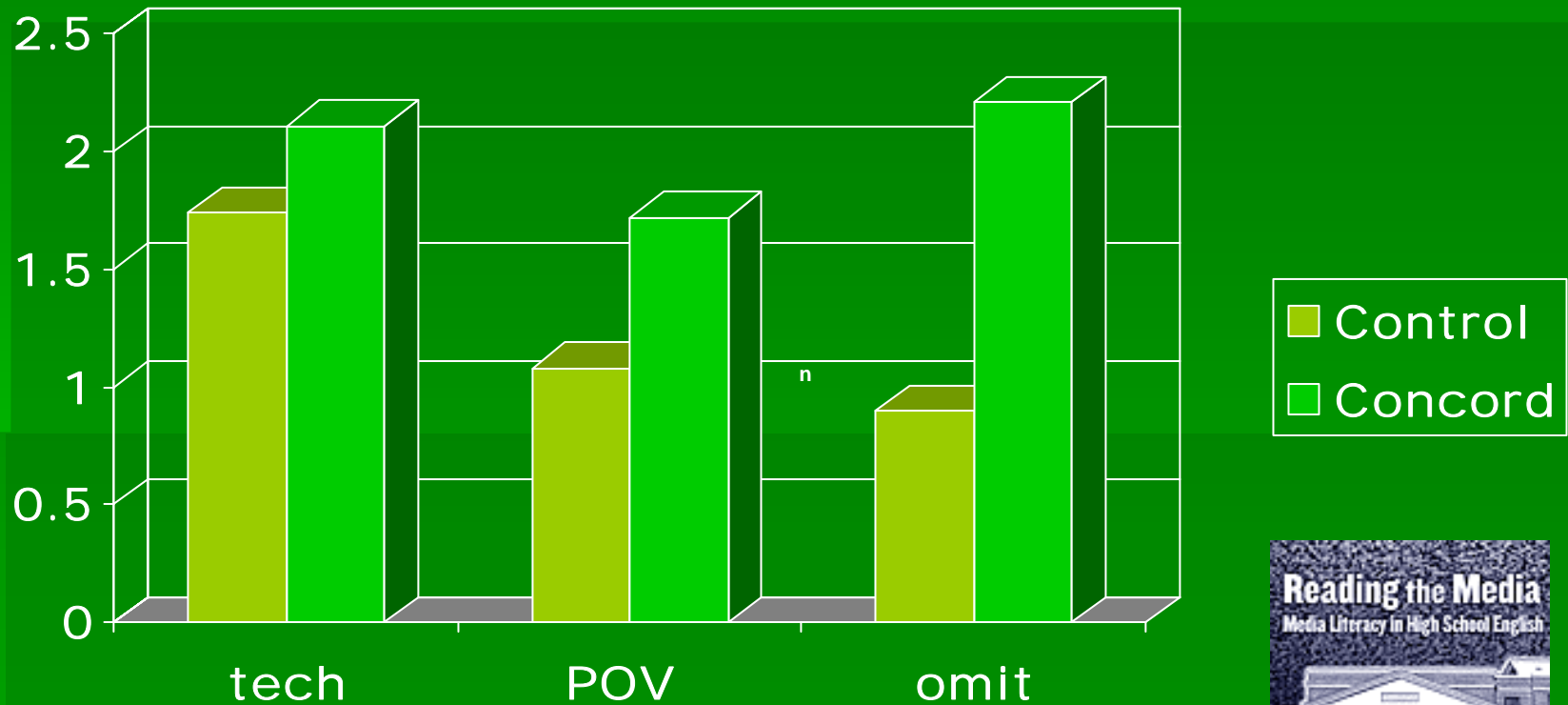
Increased Reading Comprehension Skills



Main Idea = number of key points identified in summary
Info Detail = number of specific details recalled



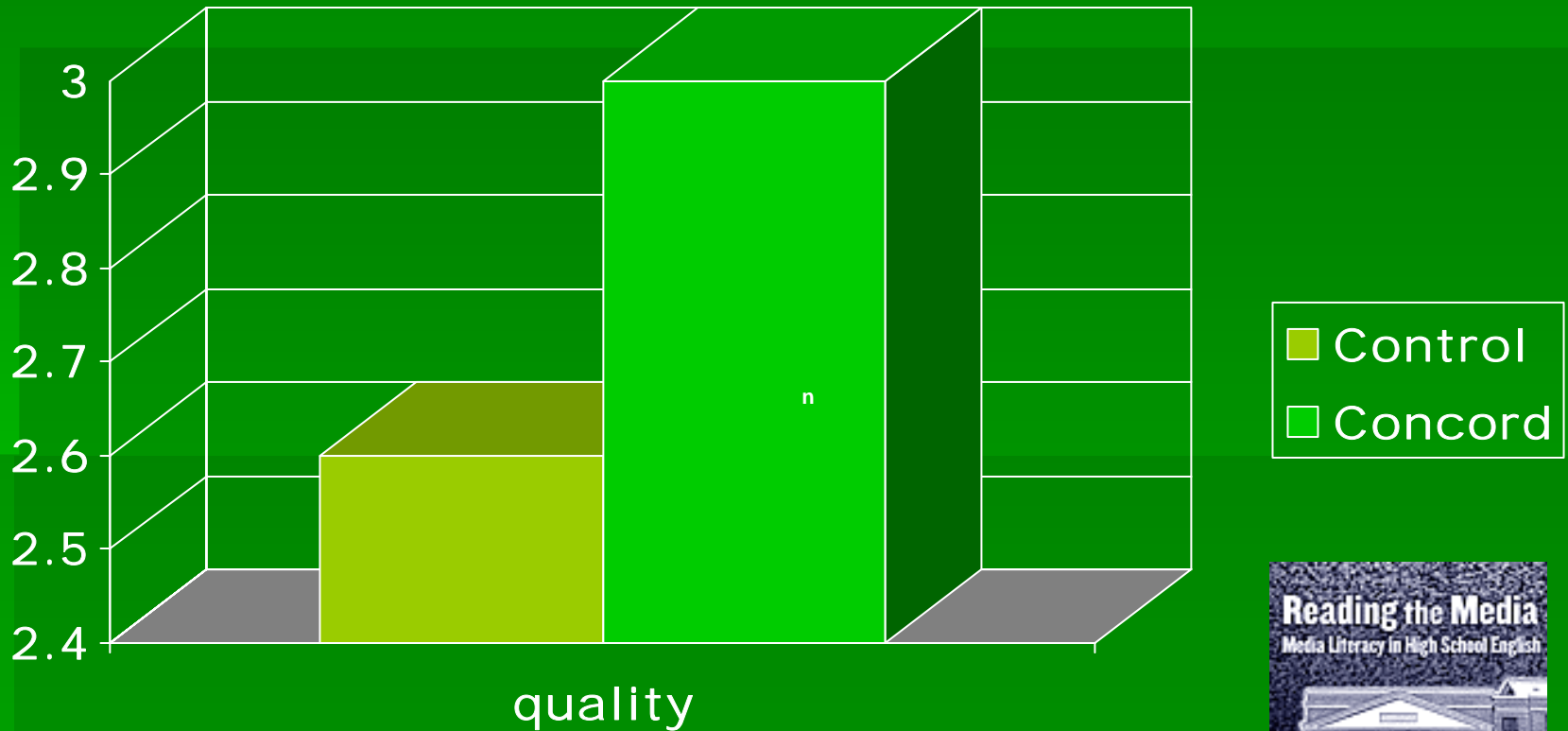
Increased Non-Fiction Reading Analysis Skills



tech = number of creative construction techniques identified
POV = multiple points of view identified
omit = omitted information supplied



Writing Skills



Quality = holistic score (1 – 5) evaluating clarity, coherence, and sentence structure



Measuring Program Impact

Advertising Analysis

- Increased understanding of the complex purposes of advertising
- Recognition of unstated subtext messages in advertising



Measuring Program Impact

Critical Viewing Skills

- Increased skills in analyzing purpose, point of view, subtext & construction techniques

Civic Engagement

- Increased reading and viewing of news and current events



Measuring Program Impact

Impact on Print Literacy Skills

- Ability to summarize non-fiction informational text and recall details
- Ability to analyze author's purpose, point of view, subtext and creative construction techniques
- Writing skills improve



Student Voices

“Creators of books and movies have to make critical decisions about how to construct a story just like newspaper editors and TV news directors.”

“I found myself wondering about the intentions of things that in the past I would have ignored or absorbed at face value.”



Student Voices

“Though I considered myself a critical thinker prior to the course, I don’t think that label fit my reading style at the time... I had been trained to passively read a book with a ridiculously obvious theme, come up with the thesis statement, and crank out a paper. This course made that impossible.”



The Learning Environment at CHS

Curriculum reform initiated by faculty

Block scheduling, heterogeneous grouping & common planning time

Vibrant school library media center

Support from school administration

High quality local newspaper



Challenges for the Future

RELEVANCE: Continuing to be responsive to students' lived experience with media and popular culture

INTERNET ANALYSIS: Critical thinking about online media and technology

AUTHORSHIP: Providing multimodal production opportunities for all students

OUTREACH: Implications for education policy statewide



Why It Matters

“A democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection, not an invitation to hypnosis.”

-Umberto Eco

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